

WASHINGTON, DC- In a nationally televised speech today, President Bush once again reiterated his claim that, "If this kind of coverage is good enough for the United States Congress, its good enough for America's seniors."

"I can understand why President Bush keeps saying this. It sounds great. Unfortunately, it's not true--not that we should be surprised since he's been more than willing to ignore the truth with regard to Iraq. The drug benefit being discussed in his Medicare prescription drug plan is far less generous than the benefit Members of Congress get," said Rep. Pete Stark, Senior Democrat on the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, the vast majority of Members of Congress are enrolled in the Blue Cross Blue Shield standard option plan. This plan's drug benefit has no deductible, \$25% cost-sharing, and has an out-of-pocket spending limit for all medical costs of \$4000 a year.

In contrast, the Medicare conference is considering a drug benefit with a \$275 deductible, 25% cost-sharing for the first \$2200 worth of medications, then roughly a \$2900 doughnut hole in coverage in which beneficiaries pay 100% of their drug costs until they spend \$3600 out-of-pocket. After that point, Medicare beneficiaries still pay 5% of each medication.

President Bush used three examples of seniors with specific monthly drug costs. In each of these cases, a Member of Congress pays far less in drug costs than would a Medicare beneficiary under the bill the President is promoting. At \$200 a month in drug expenses, a Member of Congress would annually spend \$600 out-of-pocket, while a Medicare beneficiary would have to spend \$956.25. At \$525 a month, a Member of Congress would spend \$1,575 for the year, while a Medicare beneficiary would have to spend more than twice that much -- \$3,662.75. At \$800 a month, a Member of Congress would spend \$2,400 for the year, while a Medicare beneficiary would have to spend \$3,828.25. [Charts](#) show comparative expenditures on a monthly and annual basis for each of these examples used by the President.

"On yet another topic, President Bush is playing fast and furious with the facts to win public support for an issue of which the public is inclined to be suspicious. Well, as these charts prove, that suspicion is well founded. This drug benefit isn't as good as what Members of Congress get. Rhetoric from the President won't fix it. Those Members of Congress negotiating this Medicare bill need to go back to the drawing board and come back with an affordable, meaningful drug benefit for America's seniors. That's what they're expecting from Congress

and they deserve no less. To use the President's own words, if its good enough for Members of Congress, its good enough for seniors," concluded Rep. Stark.